

Let's Go Where Dreams Can Happen by pookiestheone

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Summary:

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And it is a Christmas fic, although it takes a while to get there.

1. California here we come

Author's Note:

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And it is a Christmas fic, although it takes a while to get there.

They had both been accepted to UC Berkeley so in late August Steve and Billy climbed into Steve's car and drove to California. Steve and his father had flown out in July and found him a modern condo that his parents were going to rent for him. He still hadn't told them that Billy was going to share it; he would cross that bridge if he had to since it was unlikely they would ever visit. He had just said that since Billy was going to the same school it made sense for them to drive together instead of having him make his own way. After all they were friends.

Billy wasn't really surprised when he was accepted. He had always had decent marks, but in his last year he had the incentive to make sure they were a lot better than decent. It meant his escape and a big "fuck you" to his father. When he said where he was going his father had just looked at him.

"California. I should have known. Well, I don't expect much from you anyway."

"No, sir, I know you don't, but remember, you won't have to pay. Mom left me that money when I turned eighteen just so I could do what I wanted with it. And I think she would be happy that this is what I chose."

"You're not taking the car."

Even though the car was in his father's name, Billy had paid for part of it and the fact that he ignored that, didn't even offer to give him some money for it, hurt but didn't surprise him. The car would likely

just sit because Susan wouldn't drive it and then he would sell it when he got tired of looking at it. Or as soon as Billy left.

"I didn't expect to."

The money from his mother wouldn't be enough, but it paid for tuition and books, plus something toward rent, and he would find for a part time job to cover the rest.

When Steve heard that they would be going to the same school he settled it.

"You'll live with me. We'll both have free rent so all we'll need to do is share the other costs." He teasingly elbowed Billy, who was sitting on the bed beside him holding his acceptance letter. "And I think there will be other benefits."

2. Beginnings are always messy

Billy had always thought of himself as an equal opportunity guy; as long as he got what he wanted the sex of the person didn't matter. Of course that was in California but in Hawkins the pickings when it came to guys were slim. Even though he sensed from the beginning it would be different if he ever got the chance, ending up with Steve had been something that he didn't expect.

Not that he hadn't thought about it, especially when he saw him in the shower. Or when he caught sight of the way his jeans bunched up around his crotch. Or when he lifted his t-shirt to wipe sweat off his forehead and his hint of a treasure trail teased him. Or ... Well, he thought about it a lot. But he didn't imagine it would ever happen because saying they got off on the wrong foot was the understatement of the year, maybe the decade.

What he didn't know of course was that Steve had been thinking much the same thing. His experience was much more limited, but it wasn't from want of hoping and the occasional wandering hand or eager mouth in the corner of a dark parking lot. By all rights he should have stayed as far away from Billy as he could. He was aggressive and violent; trouble didn't follow him, he sought it out, but there were times when Billy didn't think anyone was looking that there was something else and Steve noticed it. Something beneath the bullshit and bravado. It was just that he couldn't figure out how to get past the wall of animosity between them.

It all came to a head when Steve walked into the locker room early one January morning before anyone should have been there and found Billy sitting on the bench just starting off into space. There was drying blood smeared from a gash on his cheekbone and he was clutching his side. Billy hadn't heard him so he just stood quietly off to one side.

He had noticed things in the past - a black eye, bruises on his ribs, the occasional limp that kept him from basketball practice - but he had just assumed that, because it was Billy, he had been fighting. Suddenly he buried his face in hands and his shoulders began to shake. Steve momentarily froze in confusion. He was about to move

when Billy lunged forward and drove his fist into the locker in front of him.

“Jesus Christ, Hargrove! Stop it!”

Steve took a couple of steps forward and Billy spun to face him, both hands up as if he felt threatened, red-rimmed, teary eyes glaring.

“Get out of here, Harrington.” His voice was low and shaky, but there was no anger.

“What the hell is wrong with you?” He walked toward him and pointed at his knuckles that were dripping blood onto the floor. “It’s a goddam steel locker.”

Billy looked at his hands as if realising for the first time what he had done, then for some reason held the bleeding one out to Steve. “I ... I ...”

On impulse Steve grabbed his wrist and pulled his hand toward him so he could look at it; he couldn’t tell if he had broken anything.

“You’re a fucking idiot, that’s what you are. Now sit down while I get something to bandage this with.”

Billy looked at his hand, cradled in Steve’s, then up at him.

“OK”

Steve wasn’t sure if compliant Billy was any less disturbing than angry Billy. He went to the first aid kit that hung outside the coach’s door and found what he needed, stopping at his own locker on the way back. When he returned, Billy was sitting quietly.

“First things first. Can you move it?” He watched as Billy painfully closed his hand part way. “Good. At least I’m not going to have to take you to the hospital.”

“No hospital.”

“You’re not listening. I said ... never mind. Give me that.” Billy held out his hand and Steve wiped at it gently with a washcloth he had

taken from his locker and dampened in the water fountain on the way back.

“Now this,” he held up a bottle of antiseptic, “is going to sting.” He put Billy’s hand on the cloth and poured some directly onto the cuts.”

“Shit!” Billy managed to get out through clenched teeth. “Enjoying this?”

“Shut up. Or do you want to take a chance that this will get infected?”

Billy watched as Steve carefully wrapped the bandage around this hand, eventually tying it off.

“All done, but you’ll need to keep an eye on it. Try not to bend it too much. And change the bandage because it was still bleeding.”

“Yeah. OK. Thanks.”

Steve just nodded and got up to put the roll of bandage and antiseptic back.

“I hate him. I fucking hate him.”

Steve turned to look at him. Billy sharing, and sharing with him, was maybe the most worrisome thing yet. Even so he sat back down.

“Who? The guy you got this from?” He pointed to his cheek.

“Yeah.”

“Well, how about not fighting. I mean it ...”

“My dad. I fucking hate him.”

Steve sat for a minute as the pieces began to slot into place.

“So, he ...”

Billy, head bowed, nodded.

“And I’m guessing this isn’t the first time.”

“No. It’s my own fault he says. A stupid faggot who doesn’t know how to be respectful, doesn’t know how to obey the rules.” He stopped and looked up fearfully when he realised what he had said. “Not that I’m ... I mean that’s what he says to make me feel like shit.” But something in his eyes told Steve that there was more to it than that. And, despite the seriousness of situation, it gave him hope.

“So you end up acting like an asshole and taking it out on everyone else so you can be king of the hill because king of the hill is never a fag. Right?”

Billy didn’t say anything.

“And now you’ve decided to take it out on yourself too.” He nodded at his hand. “Going to punish yourself because he’s not punishing you enough.”

“So what?” Billy’s anger was returning and Steve began to think he had gone too far. “No one gives a shit about me. The only one who ever did was my mom. So why should I care about anyone else or myself.”

“Have you given them chance? I mean since you got here you’ve tried to fuck me up from the minute you hunted me down at that party. How do you know that I couldn’t like you?”

“There’s not much to like.” Billy’s anger had gone again; he sounded small, as if he believed that.

“How about we find out. Have you had breakfast?”

Billy shook his head.

“All right that new place downtown has great food and they open at seven; I’ve been on a Saturday a couple of times. Put on your coat and let’s go.”

Billy hesitated.

“Come on, Billy. We’ll never know if you just sit there.”

The fact that he had called him Billy and not Hargrove seemed to be

all he needed.

“OK, but I can’t promise anything.”

“Fine but just don’t go in thinking this is not going to work out. At least want it to. Give me that.”

Billy picked up his coat and struggled into it as they started to the door.

“And,” Billy draped his arm across Billy’s shoulders, feeling him tense, “I wouldn’t care even if you were a fag.” Billy turned his head warily to look at him. “Not at all.”

And that had been where it all started and how they ended up in California. And how Billy was happy for the first time in years

When he walked out the door on his final day in Hawkins his father wasn’t there, too busy apparently, but Max was and she followed him to Steve’s car, carrying the last box.

“You’ve changed, Billy.”

“Have I?”

“Yeah, you can still be a dick at times, but I’m going to miss you.”

“Well, how about you think of me when you use this.” He opened the car door and from the back floor pulled out a skateboard he had bought from a store in Indianapolis and had left at Steve’s. “Now you don’t have to ride that old thing that I fucked up.”

Steve smiled at the look on her face.

Billy cautiously put his hands on her shoulders. “I won’t be back.”

“I know and I don’t blame you.”

“You’ll be OK, though?”

“Damn right. I’d ask you to write ...”

“I’m shit at that kind of stuff, but I’ll try. He’ll probably just tear them up anyway.”

“Write me at Lucas’s place.” She handed him a piece of paper. “His parents know I might get mail.”

“Right you are, sis. Gotta go.” He started to pull back then just grabbed her into a hug. “I’m sorry for ... you know, everything. And I’m sorry it took so long to tell everyone that.”

Max watched him get into the car and drive off. She saw him look back and wave just as they rounded the corner.

Notes for the Chapter:

The chapter title is a quote from John Galsworthy

3. Thanksgiving

Once they started school they discovered that their workloads were heavy, but manageable. They even had a couple of courses in common which meant they were live-in “study buddies” part of the time and that helped even more.

That didn’t mean they did nothing else. By the second week they already knew where at least one party was on the weekend. Typically, Steve had made friends with Eddie who was the graduate assistant in one of his classes. He and his partner Roy, who was apparently a well-known designer, had some type of party almost every Saturday. He said that sometimes Roy insisted on “a theme” but Steve didn’t tell Billy that part since the first one was “just show up and have fun.” And it was all free; Roy got upset if anyone brought anything.

“Really. Is there some type of catch?” Billy asked.

“Don’t think so. Eddie’s nice and unless Roy’s some type of vampire thirsting after freshman blood, what’s there to lose? You can bring some garlic if you want though.”

It turned out that, although Roy was probably fifteen years older than Eddie, he was just an easy-going guy who liked to share what he had. They were the last ones to leave, followed by Roy’s words as he stood at the doorway with his arm around Eddie’s waist. “You two can come any time, even if we’re not having a bunch of people over.”

As the end of October approached they had fallen into a routine. The first person home started dinner, the last person home washed up. Or if they were pushed for time it was pizza or Chinese or something that required little effort; not paying rent meant that Billy’s money stretched a lot further than it would have and he was happy that little things like that have to worry him. With Thanksgiving a month away, Billy started planning what they might do with the time off. That was until the letter arrived.

Steve opened the envelope and just stared at what he found inside.

"What you got?" Billy asked on the way to the sink with the last plate.

"A ticket."

"What for?"

"A flight back to Indiana for Thanksgiving."

"Oh." Billy stopped with his hands in the water. "Well, that's nice of your parents."

"It's surprising is what it is."

"When do you leave?"

"It's for noon on the Wednesday."

"It'll be great for you to see everyone. Your parents, Dustin, the whole gang."

"But I don't want to leave you here."

Billy wiped his hands on a towel and reached out, dragging him into a kiss.

"I know you don't, but you have people back there who matter, people who miss you. You need to go see them. It's only four days, Steve. I'll go to Eddie's and Roy's on Thursday. And Sheila's and David's on Saturday for that party they're already planning. None of them are going anywhere so I'm not going to be alone. In fact I'll end up with two dinners if I work it right."

"But I know you were making plans."

"Plans can be changed; it's not the end of the world. If I had the chance and there was anyone I cared about, I'd go."

"There's Max."

"Yeah. One person. And she's still living with shithead Neil. Do you think I ever want to lay eyes on him again?"

“I know, but ...”

“Be quiet. You’re going and when you come back you’ll tell me all about it.”

“I’ll be sure to see Max.”

“I know you will. Now, dry that plate and let’s get to work. I’d like to get to sleep before midnight. Especially since there’s something I’ve been looking forward to all day going to happen in that bed.”

“You’re always horny,” Steve laughed.

“And,” Billy grabbed his ass and pulled him in tight against his crotch, “you love it, pretty boy.”

Billy drove Steve to the airport in plenty of time for his flight and then headed for home. He wouldn’t admit because he didn’t want to make Steve feel any worse than he already did, but he hated the idea of being left behind. And although he had invitations and he would go, it wouldn’t be the same. They wouldn’t be able to laugh at Eddie’s antics when they got home or pick apart the couple of weird guests that Sheila and David were sure to have invited. Steve had the uncanny ability to imitate people he had only met for a short time and he would had them down pat.

He wondered how in less than a year their lives had become so intertwined; he didn’t regret it though. Steve had saved him and while he wasn’t sure exactly what he had given him in return he knew without asking that Steve felt he was important and it was nice to be important to someone after so long. Maybe it was more than that, although neither of them had said it out loud; it surprised him how much he hoped it was.

4. It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas

"It's Saturday. Turn that goddam thing off, " Steve's complained from beneath his pillow when the alarm clock started its incessant beeping.

Billy reached out, blindly searching for it, almost knocking the photo of Max off the nightstand. Steve had got Jonathan to take it at Thanksgiving. Billy had laughed when he had seen her standing with her skateboard, smiling broadly, middle finger extended upward. He was going to put it in a drawer with his socks, but Steve had insisted that they get a frame; Billy was glad they had.

Steve stumbled around the foot of bed and walked toward the bathroom, scratching his ass.

"You coming for a shower, sunshine?"

Billy wasn't sure when he became "sunshine" but it probably started because he was anything but bright and cheery in the mornings. It wasn't about that any more.

"Yeah, yeah." Sitting up, he swung his legs over the side of the bed just in time to admire Steve's ass again as he disappeared through the door. He stood up then reached down to pick up Steve's underwear where he had dropped them last night and tossed them into the hamper.

It was less two weeks to Christmas and Billy was dreading it. Steve was going to Indiana again, but this time for a week and he felt hurt even though he understood why he should go, particularly since his parents were going to put off leaving for Florida until Christmas morning if he came.

Just because he had no one didn't mean that Steve should cut out his family and friends, but rationalising it like he had for Thanksgiving wouldn't make Christmas without him any easier and he found himself blaming him for not being there. He was jealous that he couldn't have him to himself and, although he knew deep down it wasn't the case, he began to think that he wasn't as important to

Steve as he once thought he was; at least not important enough to stay with. *Fucking great! I'm going to spend Christmas feeling sorry for myself.*

"Get in here," Steve called from the shower. "I need someone to wash my back."

"Yes sir," Billy said as he stepped into the shower, running his hand down Steve's back then reaching between his legs to grab his balls. "And is there anything else I can do for you? Like maybe ..." He let go and slid two fingers up the crack of his ass feeling Steve clench when he found what he was looking for. "Like maybe this?"

"Just my back. You can play later."

"Fine," Billy huffed jokingly as he took the soap from Steve's hand. "Your loss. Maybe I won't want to later."

"Yeah, like that's ever going to happen."

Afterwards as they were eating breakfast Steve suddenly put down this toast and announced, "We're going to get a tree."

"A tree? Where the hell are we going to plant it?"

"A Christmas tree! And decorations. And a wreath."

"This isn't Indiana, Steve."

"What, you can't get trees here? Bullshit. I've seen them."

"I know, but you're only here for another week it just ..."

"We're getting a tree."

Billy knew better than to try to argue so they spent the rest of the morning driving to a tree lot, finding the "perfect tree", buying decorations and a wreath, then dragging everything home.

"This is crazy," Billy grumbled from behind the tree as Steve was on his stomach underneath it loosening the screws in the stand so they could straighten it.

"Quiet, Scrooge, and tilt it to the ...uh, the left." He stood up and moved back. "A little more left." He checked it from the side as well. "Yeah, that's it, now hold it steady while I retighten those screws."

They strung the lights, then Steve moved the coat stand out of the corner by the stairs and they set it there.

"How's it look?" he asked when he plugged it in.

"A little bare."

"Of course it's bare. God, you're grouchy. Get the ornaments and the garland stuff that woman sold us. That's how it becomes not bare. Have you never decorated a tree before?"

"Of course." *But I still don't see the point.*

"How about we get eggnog and rum for later?" Steve asked as he unwrapped the packages of silver tinsel garland.

"Eggnog? That's the milky stuff that looks sorta like cum, right?"

"Oh nice, very nice. How do you come up with these things?"

"But does that answer your question?"

"Not really, considering what I know about the person who said it, but now I'll never be able to drink it again without hearing that so I've changed my mind." He handed him a string of garland. "How long are these things? Anyway, take two and weave them into the branches. We'll use the rest when we've got the ornaments on. Don't worry about the back. "

"I can't get at the back so that's obvious."

"Shut up and weave."

Steve stood back and dragged Billy with him. "Looking better, right? Now we need to get those ornaments on. Still not sure about the sparkly red ones but you liked them."

"Now who's being grouchy. They'll reflect the light better than the

others. You had too many green.”

When they were about halfway finished with the ornaments Billy decided they had better stop for a beer. They had placed the tree where it could be seen both from the entrance and from the sofa where they sat.

“I still don’t understand why you want to bother with this.”

“It’s Christmas, Billy, and at Christmas we have a tree. We always will. End of story.”

Billy drained his bottle and set it on the coffee table before leaning his head against Steve’s shoulder.

“Have to admit it’s looking good.”

“Yep.”

“It’s just I wish ...”

“You have a Christmas wish? Is that what you’re trying to say?”

“I wish you were going to be here.”

“I know you do. I promise next year though, for sure.”

“Well,” Billy sighed, “I guess that will have to do. Now up off your ass and let’s finish this.”

The tree was a bit taller than they were, even with stretching, so they needed a chair for the last few ornaments and the topper. Steve had thought it should be an angel because that’s what his parents always had. Billy didn’t like that idea at all and found a large silver star. “Silver garland, silver star,” was all he said. They went with the star.

“OK, two things to go.” Steve said as they adjusted the last garland. “Hang that wreath on the back of the door; there’s already a hook so someone else had the same idea. And where’s that skirt thing that’s supposed to go around the bottom of the tree so it doesn’t look so ugly?”

“Still in one of those bags?” Billy suggested as he struggled to get the wreath onto the hook. “Make sure we can get at it to add water.”

When everything was in place they stood back again to look. Steve started to hum “It’s Beginning to Look a Lot Like Christmas” until Billy elbowed him in the ribs.

“No Christmas carols.”

“It’s technically not a carol. On the other hand,” he dramatically cleared his throat. “Good King Wencesl ...”

“Don’t sing. I’ll get us pizza if you don’t sing.”

“Fine, but you realise pizza only keeps me quiet for a while.”

“Something’s better than nothing,” Billy laughed as he dodged a slap aimed at his ass.

They had agreed not to buy each other anything for Christmas, but when they got up on the Friday that Steve was leaving they both still had small things tucked away. Steve gave Billy’s his at breakfast, but instead of opening it he ran upstairs and brought down his own.

“So much for no gifts then, huh?” Steve asked as Billy handed it to him.

“Couldn’t miss Christmas, could we.”

Steve’s gift for Billy was a pair of sterling silver, love-knot earrings, very different from the ones he wore all the time, because “now you’ll have another choice and, besides, I liked the look of them.” Billy’s was a scarf since somehow after Thanksgiving, Steve had managed to lose the only one he had brought with him and “you’re going to need this in that frozen Indiana butthole.”

Then Friday night Billy was alone again on a holiday. Christmas Day was Wednesday and Steve wouldn’t be back until the day after.

He had course work to keep him busy most of the weekend, but on Monday he was at a bit of a loss. He decided to clean out the fridge,

move the furniture in the living room to vacuum under it, do the laundry. And they needed some towels so he spent some time in the afternoon looking around some stores for a deal, ending up with exactly what he wanted.

That still meant he had the evening to kill so he switched on the TV to watch “A Christmas Story” for the first time. He nearly lost it more than once, particularly with Randy in the snowsuit, when the lamp was unboxed and when the dogs decimated the turkey. “You’ll shoot your eye out,” he muttered as he went into the kitchen afterward to get something to eat.

The next day dragged, but at least he had somewhere to go later. Eddie and Roy were having a “Christmas bacchanal ” although he knew it was just a buffet, crazy headgear, which he would refuse to wear, and probably too much beer and wine with a bit of weed for anyone interested. It started early so Billy arrived about five thirty and the minute he walked through the door the Christmas music assaulted his ears, there was a beer in his hand and antlers on his head.

Roy, who was wearing a lopsided Santa hat and some frightening snowflake sweater that glittered, eyed him up and down. “The antlers suit you, sorta devilish, if a devil can have weird, velvety horns. Don’t you dare take them off.” Of course he did exactly that when he turned away, but another pair replaced them a few minutes later when Eddie walked by.

“Leave them on. If I have to look like fucking Rudolph so do you. Or would you prefer one of those angel halos? An elf’s hat with ears? Wait, I know. If you really want to get into the spirit, Lydia can paint you a Grinch face. She’s disappointed no one’s taken her up on the offer. You just end up with a green face, but that might be worth seeing.”

“Fine. Antlers it is, but no photos.”

“Now what would make you think that would happen.”

“Because I know you guys.”

Just after eleven Billy made it out the door, head still ringing, pleasantly drunk and with a couple of coloured polaroids tucked in his shirt pocket. Fortunately it was only a twenty minute walk to the condo. On the way he found himself singing “Silent Night” under his breath which resulted in an odd look, followed by a laughing “Merry Christmas”, from a couple he passed on the street. The night had been a lot better than he had hoped.

As he opened the door the lights of the Christmas tree welcomed him; once again he was happy Steve had done it. Kicking off his shoes, he hung up his jacket and started toward the kitchen; now all he had to do was get through the next couple of days.

“And just what time do you call this?”

Billy’s hands automatically became fists as he spun toward the voice and planted his feet, ready to fight off an attack before he caught on to who it was.

“Steve? What the hell are you doing here?”

“I live here.”

“Don’t be an asshole. You’re not supposed to be back until Thursday.”

“Ready for a story?”

Billy nodded.

“OK, let’s sit down. This whole thing felt wrong from the beginning, but it really hit me when you dropped me off, so during the flight I decided, fuck it, I don’t want to be in Indiana for Christmas. I just told them that before I left I promised someone that I would be there Christmas Eve and that I knew it was inconvenient, even inconsiderate, but could we make it happen. Close enough to the truth. They didn’t even blink, didn’t ask who, just that they hoped she was worth it. I didn’t correct them because that’s a conversation for another day and we would both have to feel it’s the right time.”

It took Billy a few seconds to grasp what he had said. *Did he just say we would talk to them about us?*

“Mom moved Christmas to yesterday. We weren’t going to be together Christmas Day anyway so what did it matter if it was today or yesterday. Then my dad got his assistant to hunt around on Friday and she got me a flight for this morning that he even paid for. It was just too easy. Maybe it was because it meant they could leave for Florida today like they originally wanted to instead of Christmas Day. Or maybe they realised how important this was to me. I don’t really care why.”

He paused, waiting for Billy to say something. When he didn’t he shifted over and put his arm around him.

“You could have let me know,” he complained.

“Yes, but where’s the fun in that.”

“I would have made plans.”

“Listen, I’ll have you know that I haven’t been sitting here playing with myself. I’ve got everything we need for tomorrow, even a small enough turkey that won’t leave us eating leftovers for a month. Did you know we didn’t have a roasting pan? And apple pie from that bakery you drool over every time we walk by; just made it there before they closed.”

He let him go and took his face between his hands.

“It’s ... Where did that green stuff on your cheek come from?”

“A really friendly Grinch.”

“Grinch?”

“There’s a photo.”

“Of course there is.”

He leant in and kissed him.

“Merry Christmas, sunshine. I’ll tell you the rest tomorrow morning over my famous pancakes, but for now let’s go to bed.”

~~~ end ~~~